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ABSTRACT

Data from interviews with elementary school principals are examined for insights into the impact of administrative style on evaluation utilization. Characteristics of 23 principals' administrative styles are classified as being either "compliance" (CO) or "non-compliance" (NCO) oriented. CO principals are characterized by the following: (1) focuses on implementing the policies of the Board of Education and on complying with federal guidelines; (2) has trouble identifying decisions made at the school site; (3) gives as reasons for decisions that they are program mandated; and (4) focuses on budgetary matters and other externally-monitored variables as factors leading to the decision. NCO principals are characterized by these factors: (1) views the school as an autonomous unit, with its own capabilities for decision making and problem solving; (2) readily identifies decisions that have been made locally; (3) gives internally generated data-based reasons for decisions; and (4) focuses on staff input as key decision variables. CO principals focus on the utilization of externally generated data, e.g. standardized test data, for evaluation activities, whereas NCO principals focus on the utilization of internally generated data from staff meetings, needs assessment, criterion referenced tests, etc. (RL)

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ADMINISTRATIVE STYLE AS A PREDICTOR OF EVALUATION UTILIZATION*

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Introduction and Rationale

Why study the local use of evaluation in decision making at schools with specially funded programs? As citizens and educators we are concerned that the best possible programs are developed with public funds, and it only seems fair that a certain accountability accompany the use of these allocations. As program evaluators, it goes without saying, we are committed to the belief that the utilization of educational program evaluation will result in the improvement of educational programs. If evaluation is not used at the local level where program improvement for a given population can occur directly, then we need to come to an understanding of the factors affecting the use or lack of use of evaluation data for making the decisions that will lead to program improvement.

Evaluation asks the questions: Who? What? When? Under what conditions? As demonstrated by what? Today we are asking those same questions about the utilization of evaluation. This paper focuses on the "who" of evaluation utilization. Who uses evaluation? That is, are there certain characteristics of decision-makers themselves--the way they see their role--that are associated with their use of evaluation information? If so, what are these features? How do they interact with the kind of decisions made and the kind of data used?

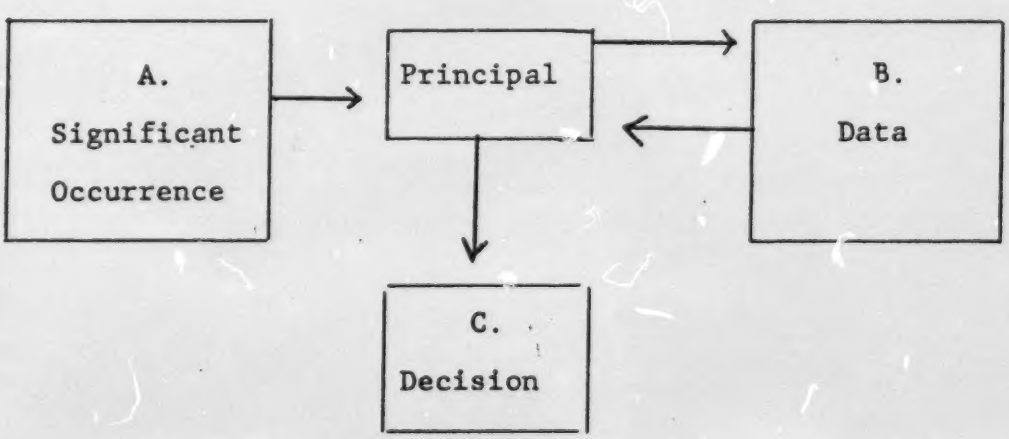
This Study

At the school level the ultimate decision maker is the principal, though there are, of course, many other factors which to various

degrees influence the decision he or she makes. The way this process works is seen in the following example from the study.

> A school gets some extra money based on need. These supplemental district funds are awarded according to the proportion of disadvantaged students at the school. This event calls for a decision as to how the funds should be used. The staff recognizes that some of the students need to improve their attitudes towards school, saying, "We've been wanting to do something about this for a long time." Additionally, the staff knows there are always students in need of reinforcement in basic skills. The principal has an idea based on his experience at a previous school: Why not have after-school special interest clubs to improve student attitudes and tutoring for those in need of basic skill reinforcement? The principal presents his idea in a staff meeting, and the staff agrees. Each staff member gets to choose the activity in which he or she will participate.

This example illustrates the various components of a typical decision making context at the school level: (1) a significant occurrence (extra district funds); (2) a principal (decision maker); (3) data (staff-perceived needs of students and the past experience of the principal); and (4) the decision (to hold after-school special interest clubs and basic skills tutoring). A simple model portrays the relationship.



In this particular case, the school's receiving extra funds is a significant occurrence, A., which calls for a school level decision. A decision is made by the principal which is based on his past experience and the staff-perceived needs of students.

Although a written needs assessment soliciting input from staff and parents had been conducted the previous spring, the principal did not mention the resulting data as a decision factor. The staff did have input in how the decision would be implemented--each chose the activity in which he or she would participate--but this input came after the original decision was made. The basic idea for action was the principal's.

In terms of the model presented above, we wondered if the decision making process sometimes started with the data itself (point B. in the model). Looking through our data we found this example: on the basis of a needs assessment conducted the previous spring, a decision was made to improve the school climate. On further examination of this case we observed that this decision context had all the elements of the first example except a significant occurrence. Instead, the decision evolved directly from the data, though the principal was again instrumental in the decision that was reached. The following quote illustrates the role that needs assessment data played as a catalyst for the decision.

> "The place where [needs assessment] is useful is the information and insight that it gives us. . . . For example, at the end of last year it was pretty clear that we had a variety of problems relating to the school climate that we had to deal with." (13P)

The principal then called a staff meeting for the purpose of identifying the focus for the next year's school-level plan. He presented the needs assessment data as well as other data he had assembled to back his case--truancy and vandalism figures, amount of graffiti, and the number of fights on the playground. He asked the staff to discuss the data and come up with a plan. The resulting plan they developed was designed to improve the school climate. Though the principal in this case managed his role differently than the principal in the first example, he nonetheless guided the decision. Both of these typical examples from our study illustrate (1) the power and influence of the principal in decision-making at the school site, and (2) some of the factors that precipitate and influence these decisions.

The situations at the two schools illustrate the two variations of the model. The decision process may begin at point A or point B, ending at point C--the decision--in either case. That is, a significant program occurrence can require a decision which in turn necessitates the search for appropriate data, or alternatively the awareness of data itself can lead to a decision. In either case the principal can be seen as the mediator who processes the input information and guides the decision. In both of our examples the principal influenced the decision greatly. Similar needs were

recognized in each case, but the data used, the timing of the decision, and the handling of the decision differed considerably.

Regarding the precipitating event, in the first case the extra funding was an external occurrence that led to the decision. In the second case it was the data itself that acted as a catalyst for the change. These factors in turn influenced the timing of the decision. The data used to make the decision also differed. At the first school an idea generated from the principal's past experience led to the decision. At the second school the principal-selected data as well as needs assessment data led to the decision. In terms of the handling of the decision, the principal whose idea from past experience was the key decision factor made the decision based on positive feedback from his staff. The principal whose data precipitated the decision allowed the idea to emerge from his staff in the process of group dynamics. In this study we will attempt to account for the differences illustrated by these two examples, and to see what bearings, if any, these differences have on the utilization of evaluation data.

The Findings

We have described two typical cases noted in our observations that led to depicting the relationships presented in the model. Our data in these examples show that the school principal is the mediator of the relationships between (1) A and B, the significant occurrence and the data used to make the decision, and (2) B and C, the data and the decision.

Although the data shows that there were a couple of schools where persons other than the principal commanded de facto authority over program decision-making, in most cases the principal was the locus of the decision making context. The final approval for all decisions if not the decision itself was of course always the responsibility of the principal. Not only was he or she the final authority for all decision making, he or she determined to a great extent what information should be used in making decisions, as indicated in the cases discussed above.

Individual differences in principals' orientation to their management or decision making role became apparent to us during the interview process. When asked to describe his or her duties in relation to the specially funded programs at the school, one principal responded as follows.

(a) "It is the principal's duty to implement the policies and procedures of the board of education: the guidelines for all these programs are relatively inflexible. It is the principal's job to see that the school is in compliance with these guidelines, to monitor the program to see that they're in compliance." (13P)

In contrast with this description, another principal characterized his duties this way:

(b) "I think the uniqueness of a school with this kind of funding is that you have an awful lot of personnel. And you have an awful lot of help. We have a bilingual coordinator, we have a person out in the yard for motor skills, we have an ongoing daily staff development program where I'm able to meet with teachers for a half

hour each day by grade level (primary, middle, and upper). Really, I think, in terms of meeting the guidelines, the objectives of all these programs, I see my role as getting--developing--a cohesive staff, and taking time necessary almost on a daily basis for ongoing planning, problem solving, program development, and developing a high morale and commitment to the program." (02P)

As we gathered quotes from the other interviews a pattern began to emerge. Let us first try to characterize the distinctions we noticed and then describe where these characterizations led us in capturing their association with various types of evaluation utilization.

As we reviewed the role responsibility data from the principals' interviews, we found others that seemed similar to quote (a) above.

(c) It is extremely important to bring the school into compliance--it is the number one responsibility of the school principal. Another major role is organizing the advisory committees (compliance) that go with the two programs. (06P) /Paraphrased/

(d) "Related to the Comp. Ed. and SI program, /my duty/ is to oversee them, to make sure that the people who are in charge of the individual programs are carrying out the policies that are set up by the Federal Government, and also by the State Government. To supervise personnel, to bring to personnel and to the coordinators any new changes or additions to policy." (10P)

The three principals whose concepts of their roles are represented in quotes (a), (c) and (d) show concern for compliance issues, indicating that these directly impact their duties. At the other end of the spectrum are those principals who see their duties more in

terms of internal school concerns, such as represented by quote (b) above. Other principals similarly indicated an emphasis on what they can accomplish as an end in itself at the school site.

(e) "To be perfectly honest, I have very little to do with those programs other than the overall supervision of the persons who handle those programs. I make sure that we are on track, monitoring that we are moving ahead." (12P)

(f) "If I were to do what the district board, my immediate supervisor, the district, the state of California, and the government wanted me to do, I would have long been gone from this earth--long gone. . . . So it becomes a case of survival, and very much so. Fortunately, I'm able to do this, some of my peers cannot and they've had some very serious problems--heart disease, what have you. Because in the last ten years or so, since education has gone from the local control to the national, the state, . . . the paperwork, the demands, the compliances, all these things have come on. Well, they add things, and very little resources with it." (29P)

Not only did this second group of principals not mention compliance issues in relation to their duties and responsibilities vis a vis the consolidated programs, their tone and attitude tended to indicate a lack of concern in general for so-called bureaucratic matters. This is not to say that they did not attend to those matters; merely, they did not focus on such issues in the representation of their own duties. If the first group of principals quoted above might be described as "compliance-oriented," we might then refer to the management style of the second group as "non-compliance oriented."

The question we then began to ask ourselves was--are these quotes a fair representation of the administrative styles of the principals? There would be no point in pursuing the matter of utilization prediction if the data we were picking up were invalid. The next step was to carefully study the data summaries for those principals who seemed to definitely fall within one category or the other.

We reviewed both their role definition statements and other points in the open interview where references to their particular administrative points of view were found or implied. After identifying these "classic" examples we made lists of criteria which seemed to fit each category. These criteria were then used as a standard against which to compare the other principals who less clearly preferred one style or the other. These criteria are summarized below as characteristics of the two types of principals.

What we found was that there was a consistency of approach; we were able to characterize most of the 23 principals on the basis of these criteria as being either "compliance" or "non-compliance" oriented. Principals represented by quotes a, c, d, and six others were compliance oriented, exhibiting three or more of the criteria listed. Those represented by quotes b, e, f, and eight

Characteristics of Principals' Administrative Styles

Compliance Oriented	Non-Compliance Oriented
1. Role description--focuses on implementing the policies of the Board of Education; sees that the school's programs are in compliance with the Title 1 Guidelines and/or the written proposal.	1. Role description--views the school as a more or less autonomous unit, with its own capabilities for decision making and problem solving. Focuses on administering a smooth running, self sufficient school rather than on the need to comply with external requirements.
2. Has trouble identifying decisions made at the school site, indicating that the mandated programs do not allow much flexibility. Identifies decisions that are beyond the control of the school.	2. Readily identifies decisions that have been made locally.
3. Gives as reasons for decisions that they are program mandated.	3. Gives internally generated data-based reasons for decisions.
4. Focuses on budgetary matters and other externally-monitored variables as factors leading to the decision.	4. Focuses on staff inputs as key decision variables.

others were non-compliance oriented, exhibiting at least three out of four of the listed criteria for that category. There were one or two principals who did not clearly fall into either category. This is not to say that a clear-cut dichotomy on the compliance dimension is represented in principals' administratives styles, but that general tendencies can be identified in most cases.

Having managed to categorize administrators' styles, we then wondered if the degree to which they exhibit one tendency or the other may predict an index of their utilization of evaluation information. Is administrators' style as characterized in our data closely associated with the utilization of evaluation information? Let's examine the kinds of evaluation utilization that were mentioned by principals in each of the two groups.

First we'll outline the kinds of data, both externally and internally generated, that were available as perceived by those interviewed. Then we'll describe the patterns of use that emerged in our analysis. It should be born in mind that the range of possibilities for externally generated evaluation data was limited; possibilities basically included the PQR (state or district) and test scores. Schools could request special evaluations from district offices but we found no examples in our data of that occurring. As far as internal evaluation was concerned, a needs assessment soliciting input from staff and community was required, but there were no specifications as to what form that assessment should take. Possibilities for other kinds of internal evaluation were theoretically endless, but not necessarily required by external authorities or pressures. Internal evaluation activities included needs assessment, evaluation questionnaires, e.g. rating

sheets of staff development activities, and informal discussions at general staff meetings, grade level meetings, and team leadership meetings. The community had input through advisory councils and written needs assessments. One or two schools also had evaluation committees which monitored program implementation in the classrooms.

It turns out that despite this fairly limited range of types of evaluation activities, the kind of evaluation which tended to be utilized by a given principal can be predicted by his or her compliance orientation. Those principals we categorized as "compliance-oriented" showed a different pattern of evaluation utilization than did principals classified as "non-compliance oriented."

The following examples from our data illustrate the kinds of data compliance-oriented principals utilized.

Group A. Compliance-Oriented

(regarding the PQR)

> "It does help for somebody else to look at you . . . somebody outside . . . to tell you some of the good things you're doing and where you can improve. I think it's, in a way, support . . . for somebody to come in who's an authority, shall we say, as well as the district, to say, 'This, we think, will help the children improve in reading, inprove in math and language . . . . ' I see it as a positive thing." (06P)

> "From the team that came in and gave us a mock MAR we were able to see some of the areas that I don't see or the resource people don't see, because sometimes it takes an outsider to come in and see things that you don't see. You don't always see your own faults, and so there you have to have outsiders." (08P)

(regarding test data)

> "I think that we have a better understanding now, through working closely with T&E as to what the tests mean and how they can help in working with the children." (09P)

> "The basic information that he [the testing coordinator] used was the testing materials the teachers turned in to him based on the test material which is pretty comprehensive. We do a lot of testing on the DGD. And the summaries the teachers turned into him--it just seemed that we were not meeting what that objective was in the program." (15P)

> " . . . it's not whatever the teacher thinks . . . it's what the test shows." (20P)

In nearly every case in our data, the Group A principal focused on the utilization of PQR data when the topic of evaluation was introduced. The second most frequent focus was test data of the standardized type. We noticed that both of these types of evaluation data are externally created and imposed on the school. Non-compliance principals, on the other hand, focused on the utilization of internal evaluation activities to a far greater extent than did compliance-oriented principals. Most of these non-compliance principals indicated a negative attitude toward externally generated evaluation data.

Instead non-compliance oriented principals looked to data generated within the local school as the most valid and relevant for decision making, as can be seen in the following quotes.

Group B. Non-Compliance Oriented

(regarding internal evaluation: meetings)

"We have a faculty meeting every solitary week, with the theory being that (1) they're the ones who know the problems, not I; and (2) if we can get a problem out of the way before it starts getting big and festering it's much better . . . ." (26P)

"I think evaluation, really--for it to transfer back into what's actually happening in the classroom, I think it has to really involve the people that are implementing the program. They have to discuss whatever topic or problem long enough where they're really involved, where they're really attemtping to come up with solutions. You can't solve anything unless you really evaluate the situation. They do this on a daily basis either between team partners, as a total group--it depends on different aspects of the program." (02P)

(internal evaluation: evaluation committee)

"We do a local school evaluation of our program. We do this every year. We set up our own team. And that team consists of classroom teachers, parents, aides and administrators. And at that time they go through the rooms and they take a look at the various components of instruction. We don't think of it as a 'mock PQR.' These are our own needs. We don't try to mimic that. This is strictly for us." (27P)

(internal evaluation: observation)

We do a lot of formal evaluation that really is worthless . . . . What we get through T&E is a lot of statistics that really have no meaning for us. Evaluation for me is this: alright, we're having a book fair, and we worked on it last year . . . and teachers really weren't into it, what was the problem? They really didn't know how to get into it. That was our evaluation. So what are we going to do? We're going to plan differently next year so that teachers will be better prepared to do it. They'll have more background; they'll know how to get the children motivated. You don't do this formally. You make observations. A lot of people are making observations. Teachers come back and they talk to you. We do a lot of talking to each other. (19P)

Group B. Non-Compliance Oriented

(regarding internal evaluation)

> "The information that comes from people and agencies that purport to serve us is about 99% ineffective. The information that we act upon is generally self-generated." (03P)

The apparent pattern in these examples is that the group B principals tended to regard externally generated data as being of very limited use to them in their decision making. Terms and phrases such as "mindless," "almost useless" and "99% ineffective" in reference to PQR's and test scores do not indicate much confidence in these measures. This group apparently prefers to make decisions on the basis of data over which they have more control--internally generated data from staff meetings, evaluation committees, needs assessments and observations.

What these patterns seem to be telling, overall, is that principals who look to externally generated data for making decisions are those who emphasize external, compliance issues in their responses to questions about significant occurrences, decisions, and the factors that precipitated them. Conversely, the non-compliance oriented principals tend to see the internal structure of the school setting as providing their frame of reference.

Summary and Conclusions

We began our study with the belief that an examination of some features noted in our data would give us additional insights into administrative style as it impacts on evaluation utilization.

A rich source of data from our interviews with elementary school principals contained some interesting though dissimilar cases regarding some aspects of the decision making context. Based on these data, we proposed a model that would account for the primary context dissimilarities--the decision source as a significant occurrence or as the awareness of data; a model that would show the principal as the mediator of the relationships among the A, B, and C factors in the decision context: a significant occurrence, data, and a decision. Examples drawn from our data showed how we derived the model. Having broadly outlined these relationships, we focused our analysis on the principal as the mediator, looking for trends in our data which might bear on evaluation utilization patterns. We think we uncovered some trends in the compliance orientation of administrative style. Nearly every principal could be categorized according to his or her orientation to issues of compliance. These orientations turned out to be good predictors of use patterns.

What we have tried to suggest is an orientation, not a dichotomy. A compliance-oriented principal who focuses on test scores does not necessarily eschew internal evaluation altogether; a non-compliance oriented principal may find PQR recommendations less than valid but does not disregard them totally. If follow-up studies with more intensive conceptual and statistical analyses show that the relationships and predictions we suggest here can be supported, these will have implications for evaluators, program directors

and principals. Principals can become more aware of their own patterns and, through a better understanding of the way their own style influences their use of information, can be in a better position to alter these patterns. Program directors can recognize the need for a balance in these orientations when selecting staff. Program evaluators can consider individual preferences when designing their evaluations. We suggest these directions for future studies of evaluation utilization.